

Alison Young, USA TODAY 5:51 p.m. EST February 20, 2013

A photograph of a playground area. In the foreground, there is a red and blue play structure with slides. Behind it is a long, grey concrete wall. To the left of the wall, there are some trees and a utility pole with wires. The ground is dirt and grass.

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The EPA did the tests after USA TODAY last September questioned
(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/11/15/epa-new-jersey-lead-soil/1414681/>) why regulators weren't investigating the potential for lead contamination

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at the playground, given that it was just across the property line of the former site of Barth Smelting, which records indicate operated from about 1946 to about 1982, and maps show the site was a lead battery factory before then.

At the time, the EPA issued a statement saying it would test the soil at the playground "as a precaution" even though it "has no reason to believe at this time" that Barth Smelting contaminated the ground.

In response to USA TODAY's "[Ghost Factories](http://ghostfactories.usatoday.com)" investigation (<http://ghostfactories.usatoday.com>) of government failures to investigate dangers posed by long-closed lead factory sites, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection had examined the Barth Smelting site last spring. In a May 4 report to the EPA, the state said it confirmed that the lead factory had once operated at a property at 99 Chapel St. in Newark. Although the report noted that the Terrell Homes playground was next to the old factory, it said no further investigation was needed (<http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/414673-site-11a-barth-smelting-chapel-st-pre-cerclis.html>) because the factory site itself was occupied by another business and the soil largely covered with cement — capping any contamination on that property. The EPA signed off on that conclusion, the records show, despite the potential for lead fallout from factory smokestacks to have crossed the property line.

Keith Kinard, executive director of the Newark Housing Authority, which runs the Terrell Homes, said he learned of the EPA's soil test results Friday. He said the playground equipment was being dismantled Wednesday and a fence will be installed in the next 48 hours to keep children away from the grassy play area. He said staff will keep residents away from the contaminated area.

"Fortunately, it is 32 degrees outside, and residents are not generally looking to play on this strip of land," Kinard said in an e-mail Wednesday.

Lead is a cumulative poison, and experts say there is no safe level of exposure. Children can suffer irreparable loss of intelligence and other health problems by regularly ingesting even a few tiny grains of lead particles when they put dust-covered hands or toys in their mouths.

"If it was your kid, would you have them play there for another day?" Baptista said she asked EPA staff.

The delays in protecting children from the contaminated playground also concerned the Rev. Fletcher Harper, executive director of GreenFaith, a New Jersey environmental justice organization. "They deserve a clean, healthy environment," he said Friday.

The EPA plans to hold a community meeting (<http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/604197-site-11a-barth-sampling-update-february-2013.html>) in the coming weeks, and it plans additional soil testing in the area. In addition to finding contamination at the playground, tests showed dangerous levels of lead contamination in two yards at two nearby private homes, the agency said in documents released Friday.

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